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Household Calendar

March 1 1937
U. S. Department of Agriculture

Read the Label on the Spring Coat

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, March 25, 1937.

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MR. SALISBURY: Here we are around to our weekly home economics feature again. And as usual Ruth Van Deman is on hand ready to give a timely interpretation of some of the research work in the Bureau of Home Economics.

Ruth I don't know whether you're planning to talk about Easter outfits today, but if you do I hope you'll explain the new hats.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Explain the new hats, Morse. Don't you know I'm a sober home economist. I'd have to be an artist of the Surrealist school to explain the hats this year.

MR. SALISBURY: Surrealism - that's the word. Maybe that explains a hat I saw the other day loaded with pea pods and carrots and strawberries, just like a huckster's wagon.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I could tell you about some even more fantastic than that. But I must get on with the job of a sober home economist. I thought this might be an opportune time to mention Clarice Scott's guide to buying coats.

MR. SALISBURY: Coats for the whole family?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, just women's coats. But I suppose some of the ideas about quality of material and workmanship would hold for coats in general.

MR. SALISBURY: All right, go ahead, Ruth. Whatever tips you can give to women shoppers will benefit us all anyway. I believe it's estimated that women do 85 percent of the buying in these United States.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, so it's said. Well, last fall Miss Scott wrote an eight-page leaflet called "Quality guides in buying women's cloth coats." It's packed full of good information that she collected in a study of ready-made coats. Then the other day I went down and talked with her and the other textile people to pick up any new points about the coats this spring.

They all agree that you need to look at the fabric very carefully, and read every label attached to a coat - any printed facts you can find about the quality of the cloth, and the lining, and the fur if it has a fur collar.

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This spring they say they've noticed more labels than ever, giving facts about coat linings and the outside fabrics.

Miss Scott showed me one that certifies that the coat fabric has been preshrunk and "will resist excessive shrinkage in dry cleaning." Of course just what is "excessive shrinkage" might leave room for argument. I'd buy with greater confidence if the label said completely or thoroughly shrunk. But all such labels are a move in the right direction, and I'm not one to refuse half a loaf if I can't have a whole loaf.

On the linings, most of the labels seem to be on synthetic fabrics. Some of these are guaranteed to wear two seasons, or for "the life of the garment" - another rather indefinite phrase, but better than none.

Here's a point to check on with synthetic materials. As you know, they fray badly on the cut edges. So turn back the coat lining if you can, and see whether there is a wide allowance on the seams. If the seams are trimmed close, they are likely to pull out.

Miss Scott showed me one coat with the lining pulled out at both armholes in the back. Probably the owner of that coat drives a car, or stands in the bus and hangs onto the overhead rod. Anyway when you have to stretch your arms across the steering wheel or high overhead you need plenty of give across the shoulders of your coat. Otherwise the lining will suffer.

So check on the seams in the lining. Skimpy seams are often stitched with long loose stitches that don't hold the fabric firmly. Fine close stitching is a mark of high quality in a ready-made garment.

Also look to see whether there's a full length pleat in the lining down the middle of the back. Sometimes in the desire to cut price, a manufacturer will just fold in a little extra fullness at the neckline, or leave a center seam unpressed, and make believe that's a bona fide pleat down the back. This spring many of the sport coats are lined only part way down, but even so they need a back pleat.

The fastenings of a coat seem rather insignificant but they have a lot to do with the wear you'll get out of it. I remember one of my friends had to discard a coat that still had a lot of wear left in it, because the fancy buckle had pulled a hole where the coat lapped. Miss Scott has some very interesting examples of good and bad buttons and buckles. Some of the bad ones went all to pieces because they were made of cardboard and mica and other cheap composition materials.

Buttons of the sew-through type generally do their job best. They are easy to sew on, and they don't cut the thread and lose off on the street the way buttons with a metal eyelet do.

Buttonholes are another telltale mark of quality in a coat. Look at them carefully to see if they're well bound or well worked.

There are lots of napped fabrics in the spring coats this year. Some may remind you of very light-weight polo cloth. Of course the napped

fabrics, unless they're of very good quality fibers and very well woven, have a tendency to wear bald or become matted and crushed. So if you happen to be choosing a coat of napped material, be sure you get a good quality.

The good old-fashioned tweeds are back with us again this spring. Though perhaps I shouldn't say old fashioned. Tweeds never really go out of fashion. They're even more Scotch and Irish than the potatoes we were talking about last week. Tweeds are really native to the country like the heather and the peat.

Nothing wears better than a good tweed. In fact, you can hardly wear it out, if it's made of long strong wool fibers. But the roughish texture and the mixture of colors do give a chance to work in short, not-so strong fibers, and maybe some not wool at all. So do more than smell your tweed before you buy it. I don't vouch for the truth of it, but it's said that even the characteristic odor of a Harris tweed has been added to fabrics to make them seem like the real thing.

MR. SALISBURY: Was that the perfume of the raw wool as it came from the sheep's back?

MISS VAN DEMAN: I believe so. Though nobody's been able to tell me exactly what gives a tweed its tweedy odor.

Just one more point from the coat experts. Beware, they say, of the style features that date a garment. That is if you belong to the great company of us who have to wear our coats several seasons. If you put the emphasis on good workmanship and material and a style suited to the type of service you give your coat, then you can vary it with new accessories and always look well dressed.

A happy Easter to you and I'll be back again next week.

MR. SALISBURY: If you're signing off, Ruth, let me have the leaflet so I can repeat the title for the benefit of any latecomers.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Surely, here it is.

MR. SALISBURY: Thank you. This leaflet has quite a long title: "Quality guides in buying women's cloth coats." But I'm sure if you simply wrote to Ruth Van Deman, at the Bureau of Home Economics, Washington, D. C., and asked her for the coat leaflet, she'd know what you meant.

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